

i begin shouting then:

"don't you ever read the goddamn papers?
don't you even listen to the goddamn news?
that fog was the most acidic
in the history of california!
it was more corrosive than toilet cleanser!"

she says, "you know i don't have time
to listen to the news.
you know i'm working on my shakespeare paper."

we both calm down then,
smooth things over.

i don't really care if she ever
watches the news or peruses a front page,
but i am sick of being called a paranoid
on the plains of a biochemical armageddon.

A CASUALTY OF THE RECENT WARS

we're lying there holding each other
and agreeing how good sex always makes us feel,
when she says, "except, of course,
when it's really awful, like this one guy,
a couple of years ago, he really had a problem."

"what was his problem?"

"his problem was that nothing happened."

"jesus," i say, "sometimes nothing happens
when we start out, but you always know
how to make something happen."

"but this guy was only nineteen!"

"look," i have to tell her, "that's even worse.
when you're nineteen and nothing happens
you're apt to give up altogether.
by my age you've learned that,
give it a chance and sooner or later
the sun always rises."

"well," she says, "i was younger too,
and of course the first time we were together

i had just thrown up.
but i gave him a second chance.
and i didn't make fun of him or anything."

"that was wise," i say. "that's a good way
to lower the suicide rate."

"now you've made me feel guilty."

"it wasn't anybody's fault," i say;
"you were both young,

but if you do feel the need for a little expiation
my catholic upbringing will help me design a suitable
penance."

ADULT TRAUMATA

trying to explain to a general education class,
the primary process of literary pleasure,
i say, "wouldn't we all like, once in a while,
to regress to that age
when we were not even ourselves yet,
when we were one with the breast, with the mother,
and the mother was the world?
and wasn't it wonderfully easy to earn applause
at the potty-training stage,
when all we had to do was go to the bathroom
without missing the target
and our world would give us a standing ovation?"

they giggle; i giggle.

but they'll soon learn,
as they turn into teachers and interior designers,
that it's not that easy to impress
supervisors, deans, and other bosses,
especially where improval implies a pay increment,

and that to merit the appreciation
of a husband or wife of many years
they may have to literally kill themselves.

I WOULD HAVE TO SAY

that the alcoholics i have known
have been, as a group,
more creative than the joggers.